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ABSTRACT

The open school concept used as an alternative to more traditional forms of schooling in selected elementary and secondary schools in Austin, Texas, includes seven major dimensions: individualized instruction, continuous progress of students, team teaching, multiage and multigrade grouping, differentiated staffing, open space classrooms and learning resource areas, and product and process evaluation. This document describes the context in which this innovation was implemented, the process of adopting the innovation, the organizational structure of the plan at both administrative and instructional levels, and evaluation processes. Anticipated and unexpected hindrances to implementation, strategies used to resolve these hindrances, and forces working for and against the change are listed. The continuation of the project, its impact on education in Austin, and 13 major strategies to use in future implementations of open school concept are discussed in the concluding section of the report. (PGD)

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OPEN SCHOOL CONCEPT IN AUSTIN, TEXAS

INTRODUCTION

The Austin Independent School District, located in Austin the capitol city of Texas, is one of 1,146 independent school systems in Texas. These systems provide free public education for approximately 2,700,000 elementary and secondary students of the State.

The College of Education at the University of Texas, also located in Austin, is one of 61 teacher training institutions in the State. And, as several other institutions, is developing in cooperation with school systems and the educational profession a competency based preservice training program for education majors with significant field experiences for the students.

Region XIII Education Service Center, also in Austin, is one of 20 Centers in the State also created by State law to provide services to all the school systems in the State. Among these services are the dissemination of educational programs and practices, consultative services to assist school systems in installing new programs and practices, and multi-media and data processing services.

Since 1970 a Texas Teacher Center Project, funded with United States Office of Education money, housed in Austin and under the direct leadership of the State Department of Education, has facilitated throughout the State a network of Teacher Centers. These Centers consist of school systems, teacher training institutions, Regional Education Service Centers, the professional associations, and the community. Their primary purpose is to encourage cooperative actions that will improve teacher education and the learning opportunities of elementary and secondary school students.

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The Austin School system consists of 9 high schools (grades 9-12), 12 junior high schools (grades 7-8), 6 sixth grade schools, and 51 elementary schools (grades K-5), which provides free public education for 59,000 students. Sixty-four per cent of the students are Anglo, 15% black, and 21% Mexican-American. Over 3,300 professional employees work in the district.

The three elementary schools involved in this study were selected as representative of the developing Open School Concept in the system. Demographic data of each of these schools is as follows:

Dawson Elementary School - Elizabeth Hampton, Principal

Grades: K-5

Student Population: 787

Student Ethnic Composition: % Anglo 35 % Black 4

% Mexican American 61

Professional Staff: # 44

Teacher and Clerical Aides: 7 Teacher Aides

2 Clerical Aides

Special Teachers: 10 1/2

Highland Park Elementary School - Wayne Richards, Principal

Grades: K-5

Student Population: 468

Student Ethnic Composition: % Anglo 99 · % Black 0

% Mexican American 1

Professional Staff: # 25

Teacher and Clerical Aides: 1 Teacher Aides

1 Clerical Aides

Special Teachers: 6

Pecan Springs Elementary School - Charley Henderson, Principal

Grades K-5

Student Population: 560

Student Ethnic Composition: % Anglo 69 % Black 24

% Mexican American 7

Professional Staff: # 22

Teacher and Clerical Aides: 2 Teacher Aides

1 Clerical Aides

Special Teachers: 7

In addition to the elementary school efforts three of the middle schools of the system are in the first year of development in Open School Concepts, and a multi-million dollar open space high school opens in September of 1974 designed to permit implementation of the concepts. The high school program will consist of learning communities within three "houses", decentralized administration, and interdisciplinary teams of teachers.

These developing Open School Concepts in Austin will be continually evaluated and disseminated throughout the system, state, and nation.

I. Background

A. Substantive Educational Issues

The educational issues that the Open School Concept are designed to address, and hopefully relieve, have emerged from the critical need in elementary and secondary education to create the kind of educational environment that will motivate learners toward a greater desire for learning and self-improvement. Among the major issues addressed are the following:

1. The fact that educational programs, in the most part, are geared to the mythical average learner with no regard for the significant range in learner variability (needs, interests, ability, achievement, rate modality and style of learning, self-concept, culture, etc., etc.). Although many programs, moreover, have been designed for atypical learners they have in fact separated these learners from the rest of the population.
2. The confinement of teachers to classrooms, thereby, isolating their professional knowledge, teaching styles, and teaching competencies.
3. The lack of community involvement in substantive educational efforts.
4. The concern on the part of students, teachers, and community that the educational decision making processes do not include them.
5. The concern, on the part of many educators, that unless teacher training institutions are directly involved in educational change in the elementary and secondary school setting they cannot adequately prepare educators for changing school environments.
6. The inadequacies of evaluation which consist primarily of empirical data derived from standardized cognitive achievement tests and utilized as evidence of "success" or "failure" of innovation.

7. The fadism of open space facilities and subsequent labeling of the housed program as open concept education.
8. The reluctance of educators generally to apply instructional systems concepts, organizational development concepts, and managerial skills common to the systems approach to education.
9. The critical issue of articulation between elementary, middle, and senior high school education.

B. Description of the Open School Concept

The primary purpose of the open school concept in the Austin school system is to provide an alternative form of schooling for elementary and secondary students. It is not intended as a panacea for all the educational problems cited in the preceding section, but rather as a process for the continuous improvement of learning and teaching. It differs significantly from the traditional age-graded, self-contained or departmentalized form of school in that individualized and personalized instruction are the major objectives of the concept.

The concept is multi-faceted and includes the following major dimensions: (1) individualized instruction, (2) continuous progress of students, (3) team teaching, (4) multi-age and multi-grade grouping, (5) differentiated staffing, (6) open space classrooms and learning resource areas, and (7) product and process evaluation.

Individualized instruction is being developed, and much has been developed, in different academic areas in each school. To attempt the task of developing and adopting diagnostic and prescriptive materials in all curriculum areas is too formable a task for a short period of time. Therefore, each of the schools included in this study are

developing and implementing individualized programs as their individual resources and capabilities permit (i.e., special education, reading, mathematics, science, etc.), and based upon the needs of the respective communities served.

Classes of uniform size taught in equal blocks of time are being replaced by an instructional system which stresses: (1) individual study, (2) small group discussions, and (3) large group presentations.

Continuous progress, which includes multi-age and multi-grade grouping, is being implemented based on the premise that a student's learning should be continuous, that he should not be repeating that which he already knows, and he cannot proceed into more difficult learning with gaps of unlearned, important material behind him.

Teams of teachers, interns, student teachers, and teacher aides are replacing the self-contained classroom teacher. Such an organizational structure permits better utilization of teaching styles, competencies, and professional knowledge; more possible groupings of students; and provides teachers additional support in instruction.

Open space facilities are being utilized to enhance the individualization of instruction. Such facilities are not in anticipation of change but in direct response to the requirements of educational need. Flexible space for student and staff utilization must be provided to house varying sizes of groups, a variety of instructional programs and activities, and to permit the mobility required of students and staff in the program. Emphasis is placed on Learning Resource Centers which house many different kinds of materials and equipment for student and staff use: programmed materials, diagnostic materials, interest areas, audio-visual equipment for individual use, books, research, etc.

Students have greater choices and responsibilities for selecting learning activities commensurate with their personal goals, and they are assigned to learning activities based on these choices, capabilities, needs, and interests.

Evaluation is multi-faceted and in addition to cognitive growth, measures are also being taken in the affective domain, teaching behavior and its effect on learning, open and closed environments and their respective effect on learning, community perceptions, teacher and student perceptions, costs of Open Concept Schools versus traditional schools, and the processes of change.

C. Decision-Making Process to Adopt the Innovation

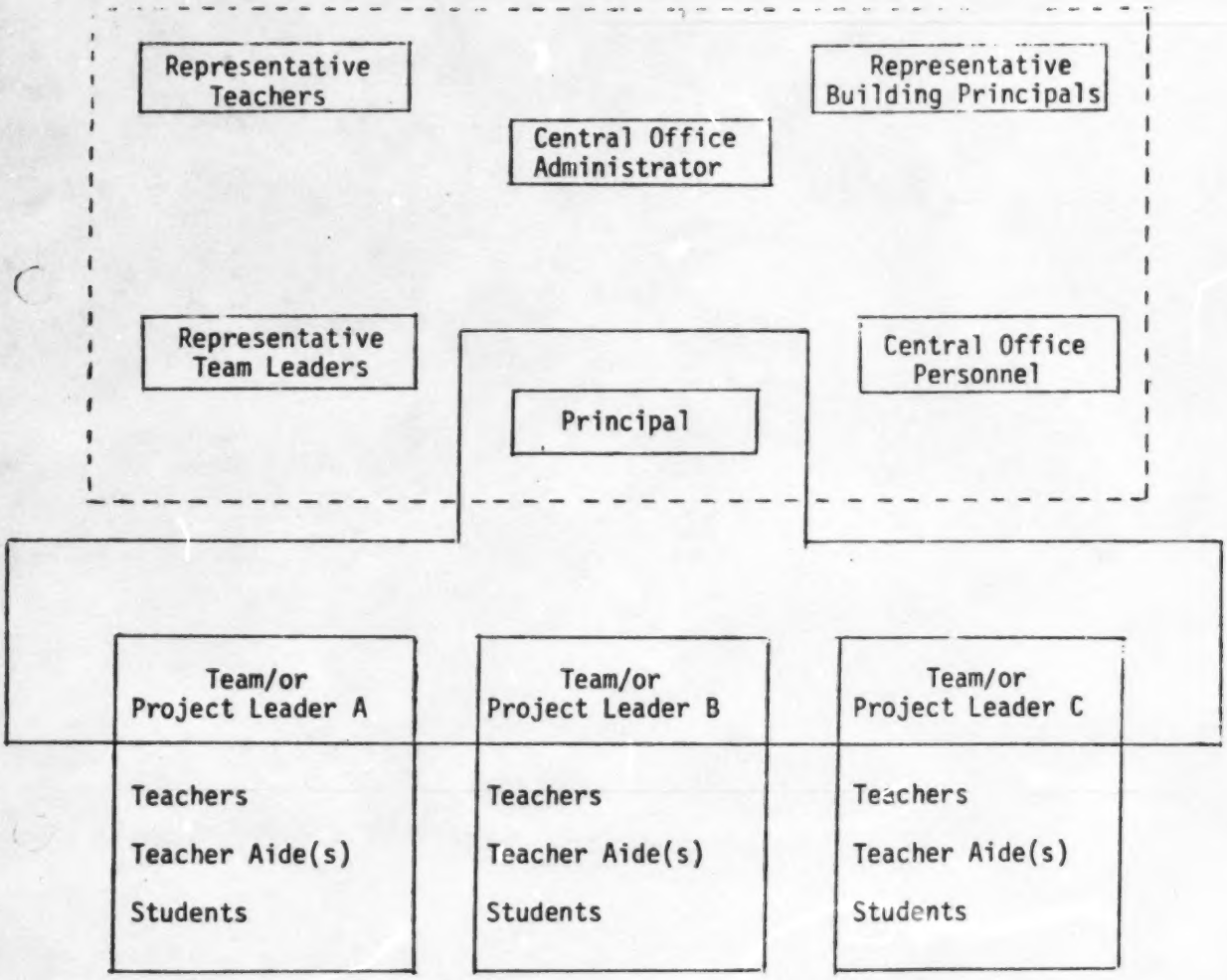
The ultimate decision to adopt the Open Concept School effort, or its specific elements, was made by the respective school building principals and staff. The school superintendent and key central staff members and the Board of Education approved the decision however, and in some cases it was the decision at this level which encouraged principals and staff to adopt the concept. The Central Administration also created a supportive environment for those staffs and principals who for years had been implementing change within their respective schools.

The influence of national innovations, the State Department of Education, and teacher training institutions cannot be minimized in influencing this decision indirectly. Neither can the Regional Education Service Center in Austin which provides consultative materials and dissemination services to schools that wish to implement new programs or "innovations". The various school communities who desire and want schools to "change" to meet modern day needs can neither be dismissed from the decision. And, certainly students themselves can not be denied an influence in the decision. As each school assesses its own student population all find that they are not meeting the needs of many students and are continuously seeking ways to meet those needs.

The decision-making process to implement Open Concept Education, therefore, cannot easily be described in that it was and is a process involving many variables. Two facts are paramount, however: (1) no one person or group of people made the decision and said "Thou Shalt Be Done," and (2) without management support from the superintendent and key central office personnel and building principals, the concept would not be implemented. Without administrative support, moreover, teachers that believe in the concepts would still be practicing them within the limited confines of their own classrooms in fear of being reprimanded for violating school policies and practices.

D. Project Management

The basic organizational structure for instruction and administrative arrangements at both the individual school and central office level are shown in Figure 1, page 6. This structure is designed: (1) to facilitate decision-making at the appropriate levels, (2) to open communications between teachers and administrators, (3) to provide mutually supportive relations among teachers and administrators, and (4) to increase administrative and instructional accountability.



----- District-Wide Policy Committee

——— Instructional Improvement Committee

Figure 1. Basic Organizational Structure for Instruction and Administration

This organizational hierarchy consists of interrelated groups at three distinct levels of operation: (1) the classroom level, (2) Instructional Improvement Committee at the building level, and (3) the district-wide policy committee at the school district level. Each of the first two levels is itself a hierarchial structure with clearly defined roles for personnel. Each level, moreover, while taking the initiative for certain decisions must secure information from one or both of the other levels. The building principal and team/or project leaders, each of whom serve at two levels, provide a communication - coordination link among the three groups.

Teams/or projects replace the age-graded, self-contained and the age-grade departmentalized forms of organization for instruction. Each team, as shown in Figure 1, consists of a Team Leader, two or more teachers supported by student teachers, teacher aides, interns, and clerical aides. The main function of each team is to plan, carry out, and evaluate instructional programs for the students of each team.

As also noted in Figure 1 the Instructional Improvement Committee is composed of the building principal and the Team/or Project leaders. Its main functions are: (1) formulation of general educational objectives and program, (2) interpreting and implementing system and state policies that affect the program, (3) coordinating the activities of the teams/or projects to achieve continuity in all areas, and (4) arranging for the use of facilities, time, materials, etc. that the teams/or projects do not manage independently.

The district-wide policy committee, Figure 1, is chaired by the superintendent of schools, or his designee, and includes consultants and

other central office staff, representative principals, team/or project leaders, and teachers. This committee takes primary initiative in: (1) identifying the functions to be performed in each Open Concept School in the district, (2) recruiting personnel for the Open Concept Schools and providing for their staff development activities, (3) providing instructional materials and resources, and (4) disseminating information about Open Concept Schools within the district and community.

E. Additional Funds to Support the Concept

The only additional funds to support the concept were provided in the 1972-73 school year when an additional two dollars per student was allocated by the district for the purchase of instructional materials.

F. Project Evaluation

Extensive evaluation efforts are being conducted. Internal school evaluation is continuous and uses survey instruments to ascertain community, student, and staff perceptions; standardized and criterion referenced tests are continually analyzed to ascertain student progress; and individual diagnostic tests utilized to ascertain student characteristics for which prescriptive materials are developed. The school district's Division of Research and Evaluation, moreover, is conducting both product and process evaluation by conducting comparison studies of Open Concept versus traditional schools. Variables used in these comparisons are: (1) Standardized Achievement Tests, (2) measures of student's self-concept and other affective domains, (3) parental attitudes, (4) teacher behavior, and (5) student behavior.

II. Change Analysis

A. Anticipated Hindering Factors and Strategies Used to Overcome Them

The factors and strategies to overcome them, as listed below, were anticipated in implementing the innovation:

Hindering Factors	Strategies
1. Community's perception of the change	1a. Extensive orientation sessions with community personnel
	1b. Continuous school-community relations
2. Teachers' feelings of inadequacy to implement the change	2a. Staff development programs by district, University of Texas, and Region XIII E.S.C.
	2b. Employment of teacher aides to assist teachers
	2c. Transfers to other schools for teachers who did not feel they could contribute to the program
3. Traditional curriculum materials and graded textbooks	3a. Increased emphasis on self-concept materials
	3b. Adoption of better diagnostic materials
	3c. Not requiring workbooks for each student
	3d. Purchase of additional individualized materials
	3e. Increase in teacher made materials
	3f. Utilizing texts as resources
	3g. Development of continum of skills and concepts in academic areas
	3h. Multiple adoption of textbooks

Hindering Factors	Strategies
4. Increased record keeping on the part of teachers and the school	4a. Employment of teacher aides to assist in clerical tasks
	4b. Permitting students to assume more responsibility for keeping track of their accomplishments
5. The lack of teacher time for planning	5a. Released time for common planning time for teams of teachers
	5b. Some in-service time devoted to planning
6. Traditionally designed facilities	6a. Remodeling of some existing space
	6b. Design and construction of open space elementary and secondary schools
	6c. Continual assessment of old facilities and the need to renovate them to meet program needs
7. Self-contained classroom and departmentalization organization at the elementary and secondary level	7a. Extensive in-service training regarding team organization, functions, roles, advantages, and disadvantages
	7b. Organization by local school staffs into teams that cut across grade and subject lines
	7c. Awareness and focus on students' learning and how to best organize the school to best meet their needs
8. Traditional graded reporting system	8a. Selection of district-wide committee to study different reporting systems, survey parents, analyze programs, and recommend to Superintendent and Board of Education a reporting system reflective of the educational philosophy

Hindering Factors	Strategies
	8b. In-school study groups 8c. Total community involvement and input 8d. Adopted new reporting system which includes more parent-teacher conferences and assessment of student progress based on his individual progress

B. Unanticipated Events that have Hindered the Innovation

Because of prior experience of the school administrators involved, the support of the Central Administration, Region XIII Education Service Center, University of Texas, and Texas Education Agency support many of the major problems of change were anticipated and strategies developed before implementation. The following unanticipated events did, however, occur which have and do hinder the innovation:

1. Student and Staff Mobility. Orienting and training new staff, orienting new community personnel, and evaluating, placing, and orienting new students are formable and continuous tasks.
2. Materials, Equipment, and Facilities. Although many materials are available for individualizing irstruction, adapting them for local programs is a most time consuming problem. Moreover, many needed materials are not available, and in some instances the lag between selection and delivery is significant. Neither was the type and amount of equipment necessary for student versus teacher use anticipated. In some instances, moreover, the type and kind of space needed by staff to implement the program was not anticipated, nor was the difficulty in having space renovated to meet these needs.

Many personnel, for various reasons, still view open space facilities as an experiment in which there will be chaos, no discipline and little learning; some view open facilities as costing less than other types; and others view these facilities as an effort to encourage and permit educational change.

3. Community Opinion. In 1971-72 eleven elementary schools of the district adopted and implemented an organizational schema known as IGE (Individually Guided Education) sponsored by /I/D/E/A/ of the Kettering Foundation. On the one hand, this process facilitated a staff and student organizational structure needed by those schools that were individualizing instruction. However, some community personnel and professional teachers of the district felt that IGE was: (1) the concept of open space schools, (2) causing chaos in schools, (3) being forced on teachers, and (4) being replicated in too many schools without adequate study.

   This unfortunate perception has prohibited some schools from implementing IGE and has had a negative effect on subsequent efforts to implement open school concepts.

4. Staff Incentives and Morale. Although it was known and predicted that implementation would require from the staff a different behavior, that frustrations of meeting individual student needs would be commonplace, and that individual staff differences would be magnified, there was no way of anticipating nor planning for the many unknown variables. How much planning time? How to best

utilize teacher skills and competencies to meet needs of students? How to identify those skills and competencies? What type of in-service training? What kinds of support systems are needed by teachers? Should differentiation of staff occur? If so, on what basis and does it also include differentiated pay? What kind of a staff evaluation system should be used? Etc.

As with item 3, the degree to which this significant element of change is hindering the open space school concept is unknown. It is a reality, however, that it must be dealt with and most positive action taken to insure that staff incentives and morale are adequate to justify their participation in such an effort.

C. Major Forces Working For and Against the Project

Forces For Change	Forces Against Change
1. The public generally favors new ways of students' learning subjects, new teaching methods, and improved school facilities	1. Some of the public and educators
2. The Central Administration is supportive of change to improve education	2. Teacher training programs in general
3. Region XIII Education Service Center supports change through innovative program support, consultative services, and media-materials support	3. Reluctance on the part of school district to provide more resources, human and fiscal, to schools that are involved versus those that are maintaining traditional programs
4. The teacher training institution, University of Texas, in Austin supports and facilitates change through active involvement and support in the schools, as well as in its own teacher education program	4. Generally, secondary education - middle and senior high schools
	5. State textbook adoptions
	6. Traditional curriculum materials

Forces For Change	Forces Against Change
5. Most teachers are committed to the concepts	7. Typical evaluation designs which are focused primarily on cognitive gain of students with no emphasis on the affective nor the many other variables affecting student's learning
6. Students are more self-directing, and more responsible for own decisions	8. Typical salary schedules of teachers
7. Parents are more involved and interested in education	9. Teacher and administrator certification process which focuses on programs rather than competencies
8. Decentralized decision-making is well accepted by teachers and students	10. Autocratic or laissez-faire leadership at many levels of management
9. Students and teachers	11. Personnel employment and assignment procedures that do not take into account the competencies needed by staff of open concept schools
10. The school environment is more open	
11. Students are more satisfied with school	

II. Strategy Design

A. Future of the Project

With the current leadership in the Central Administration and in each of the schools implementing open school concepts, the concept will be continued in the Austin Schools. Further, it is anticipated that at least four major movements will occur:

1. Impact of the Project on the School Itself. Perhaps the greatest impact of the Project will be on all programs of each school. The design of the program is around individualization of instruction which includes an emphasis on preassessment of learning, diagnosis of learning problems, and prescription

of learning activities with evaluation as an integral part of the process. In each instance, programs initially designed for specific curriculum areas have spread to other aspects of instruction within each school. It seems fair to predict that skills in these kinds of operations will increase in the future and that such programs as increased emphasis on parent-teacher conferences in reporting, use of volunteer parent and lay citizens, changes in curriculum design and content, improvement in materials and in their availability will become more extensive. It is also anticipated that the facilities themselves may be changed, where necessary, to more easily facilitate the programs within each school. Faculty involvement in all aspects of the curriculum and teaching program will increase under the leadership of the school principals with the continued support and assistance of the Central Administration.

2. Impact on Other Austin Schools. It is recognized that other Austin schools are also involved in innovative programs and experimental efforts. This atmosphere in itself encourages and supports innovation and change in other schools. Stimulation coming from principal visits, teacher observation programs and exchanges, university participation, and in the involvement of the Texas Education Agency through the Regional Education Service Center will enhance the spread of the Project to other Austin schools and to schools throughout the region and State.

3. Impact on Teacher Education. Three teacher education centers are located in the immediate vicinity of the Project. Each of

these centers has an extensive teacher education program which includes observation-participation and student teaching as a normal part of the educational program for teacher candidates. Each institution is committed to the concepts represented in the Project and has a consulting relationship to the on-going program. The role of the Texas Education Agency enhances this possibility and increases the likelihood of the participation of other teacher education centers in this and other projects. Experimental projects at the university level are being re-designed to provide student involvement with children beginning at the freshman year and continuing through the graduate program.

4. Evaluation. Evaluation, including a more comprehensive assessment of student abilities and achievement, reaction of parents, and success of students at higher levels of instruction will doubtless bring charges in the nature and design of the Project. Longitudinal evaluation is a part of the design of the Project which in turn will have its effect on the middle school and secondary levels of instruction.

B. Strategies to Overcome Anticipated Problems in Implementing the Innovation

The following thirteen major strategies should be implemented to overcome anticipated problems in implementing the open school concept:

1. The open concept school must be of developmental evolution and not imposed on students, teachers, administrators, and a community. Do not adopt the concept without commitment to and understanding of the possible consequences of carrying out the principles underlying the concept.

2. Insure, through such activities as awareness seminars, conferences, reports, and visitations, that the Board of Education and community are familiar with and committed to support of the concept, and are kept continuously informed about the effort.
3. Involve teacher training institutions in an active way in all phases of the concept, and ascertain the effect the concept is having on teacher and administrative training.
4. Select only those teachers and administrators who have the desire to undertake the difficult task of implementing the concept. Discriminate, however, between commitment and fadism.
5. Select, initially, a small number of schools, (elementary and secondary) depending on the size of the system, as the demonstration site(s). Nurture and support those for at least three years before attempting to replicate in other sites.
6. Insure that evaluation, research, and dissemination processes are defined before implementing the concept. Evaluation must consist of much more than standardized achievement test scores, and the dissemination design must prevent the typical decade's lag between research and implementation.
7. Select and begin the training of the staff before implementing the concept. This training must be continuous throughout the effort and cannot be the kind normally conducted as in-service. The success of implementation will depend on the ability of staff members to internalize the concepts and demonstrate them in practice.

8. Insure that the demonstration schools have the flexibility to deviate from policies that prescribe: report cards, district-wide curriculum, district-wide in-service training, chronological age grouping of pupils, labeling of pupils (special education, slow learners, average, gifted, etc.), pupil-teacher ratio, and the amount and kind of instructional materials that can be used. In other words, the demonstration school(s) staff must have the authority to break from many of the traditional administrative policies if they are to successfully implement the concept.

9. Assign support personnel, such as curriculum writers, evaluation personnel, clerks, and media specialists to the demonstration site(s) for the purpose of supporting the staff.

10. Do not dissipate the energies of the demonstration site(s) staff(s) with unnecessary reporting, visitation schedules, and traditional administration. The school principal must be afforded additional support in the role of instructional leader for the school.

11. If open space facilities are planned, insure that the facility specifications are based on program specifications and not the reverse. If existing facilities are used immediate consideration should be given to renovation that can more easily facilitate the program.

12. Commit additional financial support to the demonstration site(s), specifically in the areas of consultation services and instructional materials and equipment. Appropriate evaluation of such expenditures will be of significant value in replicating the concept.

13. Insure that a communication system is implemented inclusive of not only the demonstration site(s) but also the total system and community.